
Elements of Human Dignity in Dhammapada

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Abstract

Human existence is rare state of being in which we not only enjoy freedom, but also can maximize it through enlightenment at higher level. Other species or animals cannot attain that state of enlightenment, as human can do or at least have potentiality. Due to this, being human has so much value and dignity associated with it. Dhammapada, one of the most popular Buddhist texts, also talks about the value of being human and the dignity of human being. Dhammapada recognizes all human beings similar to one another and subject to fear, pain, joy etc., so we should respect each other. It has been the source of human dignity and not law as we have today in the form of legal obligation codified in various laws. It represents ethical principal which law do today. Human value and dignity associated with it cannot be given to any person, rather have to be respected, because being a human is already a matter of dignity. Human beings themselves are the masters of their lives, no others can be. The one, who understand it, will surely respect every human being including himself or herself, as a member of the same family. As universal declaration of Human Rights says in its first article, "All human Beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights..." So the dignity and rights we already have, but it should be manifested in our behavior and deeds.

Keywords: human value and dignity, freedom, enlightenment, ethics, human rights

Introduction

Human beings are the only creatures on this earth that creates the social and ethical systems based on their thinking and experience. In the long journey of human development, apart from scientific inventions, he created many things, for example- language, social system, ethics, high level of emotions, meditation and enlightenment. All he/she did because he/she felt human existence, not ordinary but very much valuable. Adding value to human life has been actually the history of civilizations. Being human is itself a matter of dignity which is said by many spiritual leaders. Why this human dignity matters so much to human beings is now a question that is important. Many answers can be for this question, but one of the main answers will be because we consider being human is being the highest state of mind of any creature. Hence, we think we must have some value and dignity as human beings. That is the reason; we are not satisfied with only having ample foods, education, luxuries, entertainment, scientific discoveries etc. This way, we want more and more, but more we want, more we suffer and it creates problems for us. We are not protected and secured by other fellow human beings. We are surrounded by pity crimes and giant wars, selfish and crook people, shortage of emotions and empathy, although have resources and amenities. We now don't know how to tackle same human creature, that we can enjoy our life with harmony, happiness, and peace. The solution is we should have some level of dignity in being human. Human dignity should be the highest

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ethics for us. If we feel being human is being with dignity, may be our behavior and action will restrained and moderate with the thinking of not only ourselves but of all human kind.

What is human dignity?

Human dignity means that an individual or group feels self-respect and self-worth as a member of human kind. It is concerned with physical and psychological integrity and empowerment. Any individual or group has a sense of self respect, self-worth mental and physical importance what one feels as being human.

This is important because, "(T) he duty to respect and protect human dignity generally forbids making any human being a mere object of the actions of a state. Any treatment of a human being by the state that - because it lacks the respect for the value that is inherent in every human being - would call into questions his or her quality as a subject, his or her status as a subject of law, is strictly forbidden."ⁱ

This concept of human dignity is as old as the history of human kind and not developed in one day or in any point of time, but through moral advancement. As Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy ⁱⁱsays that Human dignity can denote the special elevation of the human species, the special potentiality associated with rational humanity, or the basic entitlements of each individual.

Human dignity has also different meaning in different cultures, different spiritual ideology or sects in the history, but some values are similar such as love, kindness, respect etc. So we have question whether we can reconstruct the concept in the form of value according to moral development or as per the need of the to me? The answer is yes, as we have several examples in the history where some human beings it did, the Buddha was one of the very remarkable examples among them.

Difference between Human Dignity and Human Rights

Here question arises, is there any difference between human dignity and human rights or these two concepts are same? This answer can be found in its definitions. In case of human rights, it is very much defined generally and specifically issue wise. United Nations defined human rights as "Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination."ⁱⁱⁱ The human rights also have legal implications as per the law binding on signing countries. Under Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), there are 30 articles very specifically mentioned.

On the other hand human dignity is a concept of worth of human beings which may vary, but does have human rights inside. The difference is Human Rights codified by the law or binding treaty, but human dignity not. The idea of human rights is inherent in human dignity. The very first sentence of article 1 of UDHR mentions, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"^{iv}. Here we see we find word dignity that says we free and equal in terms of dignity and rights. So being human is matter of dignity as well as rights. One criticism sometimes made on human rights is, it talks about rights and not duties which encourages selfishness and social conflict^v. Hence we can say that human dignity and human rights is very much similar or the same idea with different perspectives. The duties or respecting human beings through moral development is possible through spiritual or ethical transformation of person, but human rights can be declared in the form of binding treaty or law.

Elements of Human Dignity in Dhammapada

Dignity in Buddhism is moral value, conduct or behavior. It is quality of person that makes him or she respect others not only human beings, but also other living beings. If we not respected as human beings we not feel good nor can say suffer. Buddhist teachings help us to remove these suffering from one's life and from the world. If one has dignity of being human deeply, the one will be able to remove the suffering too. In human life suffering is meaningless and no one wants suffering or wish to be treated badly. But everyone wants to make life meaningful. As Frankl writes in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Suffering in and of itself is meaningless; we give our suffering meaning by the way in which we respond to it."^{vi}

Buddhism not only talks about human dignity, but provided method how one person develops himself free from defilement and suffering that he can lead a dignified life. According to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta of Vinaya Pitaka there are the Four Noble Truths (cattāri ariyasaccāni).

The Four Noble Truths comprise the essence of Buddha's teachings, though they leave much left unexplained. They are the truth of suffering (dukkha), the truth of the cause of suffering (samudaya), the truth of the end of suffering (nirodha), and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering (dukkha-nirodha-gamini patipada).^{vii}

As we know human dignity is moral or ethical values and normative idea. Without development of human mind with knowledge of the world and life, it's not easy to accept the value and dignity of all human beings. Buddha teachings provided ideas for transformation of human beings not merely behavioral restriction or suggestions.

In Dhammatthavaggo of Dhammapada, it defined who is a noble person and further elaborates its quality which talks not only about human dignity, but of all living beings.

*Na tena ariyo hoti, yena pāṇāni hiṃsat;
ahiṃsā sabbapāṇānaṃ, "ariyo"ti pavuccati*^{viii}. (Pali)

He is not noble person who injures living beings. He is called noble person because he is harmless towards all living beings.

Here we see the noble person or human beings are the one who take care of the human beings and also of living beings. This is because he does not cause harm to any living beings. This value and dignity paid to human beings and other creatures are very high.

In Dhammatthavaggo again, the quality of person is explained which makes one senior or elder. It says:

*Yamhi saccanca dhammo ca, ahiṃsā saṃyamo damo;
Sa ve vantamalo dhīro, "thero"ti pavuccati*^{ix}. (Pali)

The meaning of the verse is, one in whom there is truthfulness, virtue, inoffensiveness, restraint and self-mastery, who is free from defilements and is wise- is truly called an Elder.

Here we see the seniority of person lie in some qualities like truthfulness, inoffensiveness, restraint and control on him. So human being who offensive to others, not following virtues and control him as not to make any wrong actions only then he is senior. This verse not stops here, but also says who is free from defilement and is wise. Defilement is being unclean or not pure in mind or action. It expects a person to be senior in all respect. It is very high moral value and human dignity.

The respect and dignity although not possible from onside, but have to follow by fellow beings too. The Buddha was once asked by Ananda if the life of friendliness and mutual support in the *sangha* was half the life of perfection. He answered:

Say not so, Ananda! Say no so! It is the whole, not half of the life of perfection^x.

Here we see the Buddha gave how much importance of life with others as what we conduct with others, we receive same. That is why this friendliness and mutual support is very important in our life. We cannot live a dignified life, if we not care for others' lives living with dignity and peaceful.

Another verse of same *Dhammatthavaggo* says:

*Na tena hoti dhammattho, yenatthaṃ sāhasā naye;
Yo ca atthaṃ anattañca, ubho niccheyya paṇḍito.*^{xi} (Pali)

It means, not by passing arbitrary judgments does a man become just; a wise man is he who investigates both right and wrong. Here it talks about justice does not lie in arbitrary decisions, but truth which a wise man investigates between right and wrong. Justice with proper investigation is also a matter of human dignity wherever have conflicts of action between people or organization.

In the world what we sow same thing we harvest. We should aware and treat any human being with proper care and mindfulness. As mentioned from *Dhammapada* in the book *The Wisdom of China and India*, "Do not speak harshly to anyone; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way. Angry speech is painful: blows for blows will touch thee."^{xii}

Dhammapada is the essence of the Buddha teachings and also easy to understand unlike complex ideas for people, but have depth in human values. The most common value is respecting life and dignity of all living beings. In *Brāhmaṇavaggo*, the Buddha talks about holy man. He says:

*Nidhāya daṇḍaṃ bhūtesu, tasesu thāvaresu ca;
Yo na hanti na ghātetī, tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.*^{xiii} (Pali)

The meaning of this verse is, he who has renounce violence towards all living beings, weak or strong, who neither kills nor causes others to kill – him do I call holy man. The value of being holy is respecting life of all beings irrespective of their weakness and strength.

Conclusion

Human beings who forget the dignity of being human can do harm or misbehave with other fellow beings. Any person aware about the dignity of oneself will never disrespect or harm knowingly. So the Buddha focuses not on others mind or behaviors to be changed, but oneself. As we see in *Yamakavaggo*, very famous and so much quoted verse here:

*Na hi verena verāṇi, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ;
Averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano*^{xiv}. (Pali)

It means, the hatred never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is universal law. This is the real transformation of a person which not only talks about respect for human kind, but guide with morals which can change the people around too. Hence we can say that the dignity of a person is cannot be respected by one person or by other, but through collective transformation of all fellow beings. This has been in very lucid and simple language, taught by the Buddha in *Dhammapada*.

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